

Draft Environmental Assessment Blackfoot River Fishing Access Sites Forest Management Projects

August 2019



**MONTANA FISH,
WILDLIFE & PARKS**

Region 2
3201 Spurgin Rd, Missoula, MT 59804

Project Overview

Proposal

Montana's Fishing Access Site (FAS) program provides public access to high quality waters for angling, boating, rafting, and other recreation opportunities. In addition, FASs are often popular areas for hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, birdwatching, picnicking, etc. FASs typically provide developed recreational facilities such as parking areas and boat ramps as well as sometimes having larger areas of undeveloped land which is often forested. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) forest management plan¹ (2018) directs FWP to manage forested FASs for public use and recreational values. Public safety, aesthetics, and visual screening are priorities for forest management in developed areas. Beyond developed areas and of secondary priority are insect and disease management, fire hazard mitigation, fish and wildlife habitat, and other recreation opportunities.

FWP is proposing to conduct forest management treatments on 4 FASs on the Blackfoot River in FWP Region 2. The sites proposed for treatment include the K. Ross Toole, Johnsrud Park, Corrick's River Bend, and River Junction FASs (Figure 1). The treatments would involve the removal of primarily conifer trees (both of merchantable and nonmerchantable value) for the purpose of mitigating hazard trees in developed areas, reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface (WUI), and increasing resiliency to insects and diseases. (Section 8, Narrative Summary below, includes a detailed description of the proposed action.) If approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, the work could begin as early as November 2019.

Area Description

K. Ross Toole FAS (Figure 2) is located 7 miles east of Bonner, MT along MT Highway 200. It lies south of Highway 200 along the north shore of the Blackfoot River and is approximately 29.1 acres in size. K. Ross Toole is a day-use FAS that offers a parking area and walk-in access to the river.

Johnsrud Park FAS (Figure 3) is located 10.3 miles east of Bonner via Highway 200, then north on Johnsrud Park Road 0.4 miles. It lies between Johnsrud Park Road and the south shore of the Blackfoot River and is approximately 17.4 acres in size. Johnsrud Park is a day-use FAS that offers a concrete boat ramp, large parking area, picnic shelter, potable water, and toilet facilities. Due to its popularity among river users and close proximity to Missoula, Johnsrud Park sees very high use during the mid-spring through early-fall season.

Corrick's River Bend FAS (Figure 4) is located 25.5 miles east of Bonner via Highway 200, then west on Ninemile Prairie road 6.0 miles. It lies between the Ninemile Prairie Road and the north shore of the Blackfoot River and is approximately 31.8 acres in size. Corrick's River Bend offers a gravel boat ramp, parking area, overnight camping, and toilet facilities.

River Junction FAS (Figure 5) is located 38 miles east of Bonner via Highway 200, then south and easterly on River Junction Road for 9 miles. (About a mile south of Highway 200, River Junction Road crosses the Blackfoot River at Scotty Brown bridge; hence, River Junction Road is also known as Scotty Brown Bridge Road.) It lies at the junction of the Blackfoot River and North Fork Blackfoot River and is approximately 130.5 acres in size. River Junction FAS offers a gravel boat ramp, parking area, overnight camping, and toilet facilities.

¹ Available upon request from R2 FWP (Missoula) or FWP Wildlife (Helena) office.

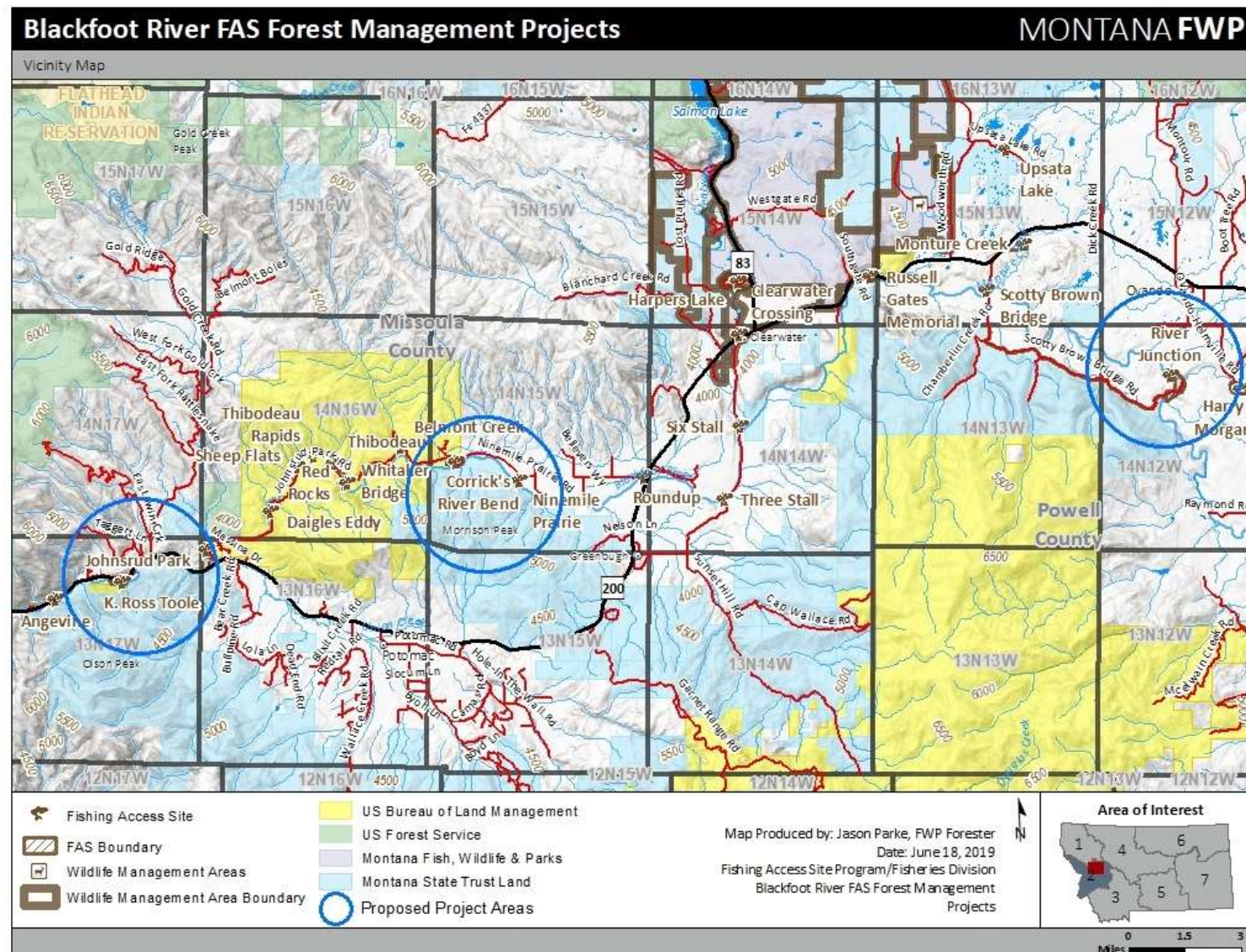


Figure 1. Location of the Blackfoot River FAS Forest Management Project's four FASs (east to west): K. Ross Toole, Johnsrud Park, Corrick's River Bend, and River Junction.

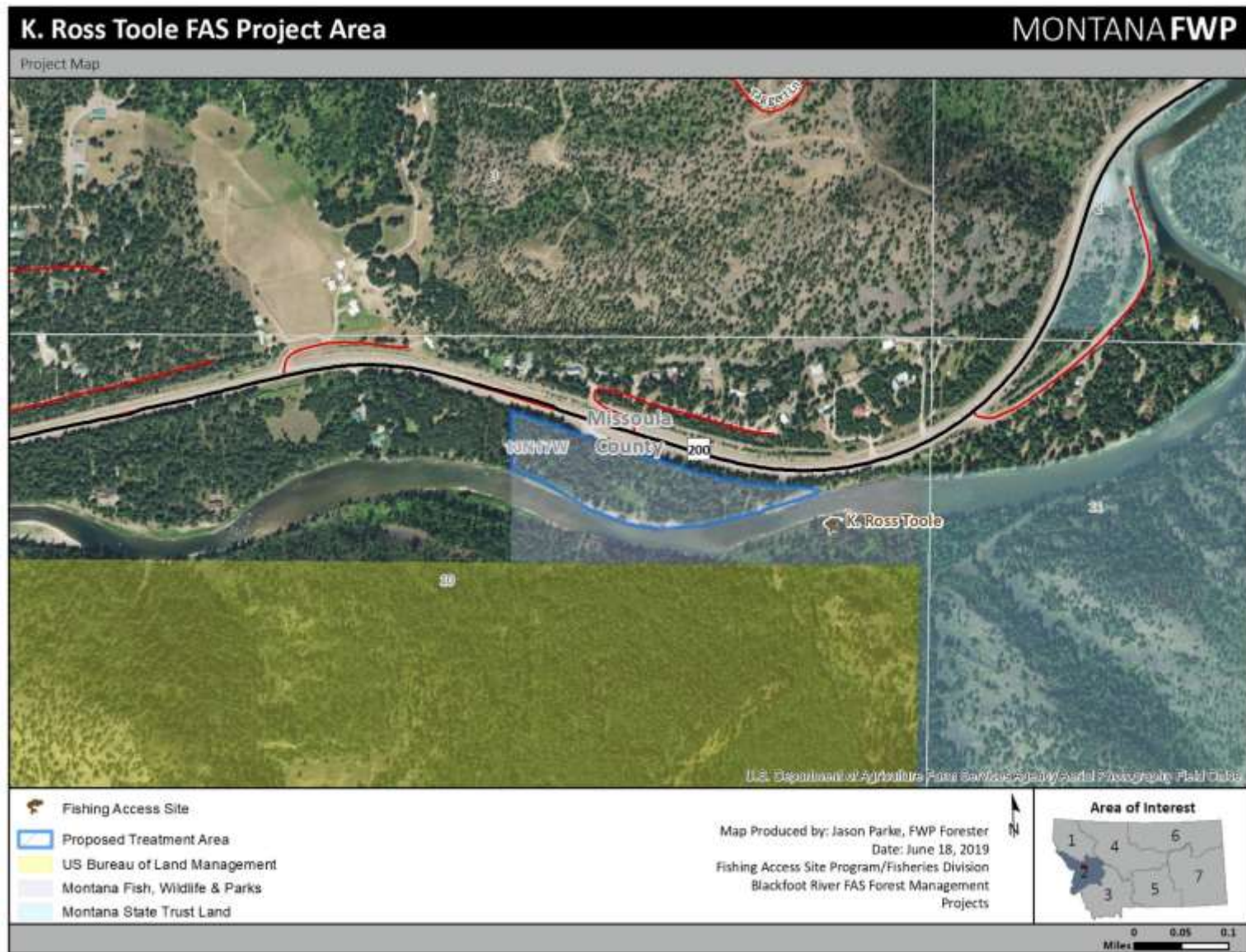


Figure 2. K. Ross Toole FAS project area map. The FAS includes land north and south of the Blackfoot River, but project would only be north of river (blue outline). (FWP land has pale pink overlay; US BLM land has yellow overlay; Montana State Trust Land has pale blue overlay.)

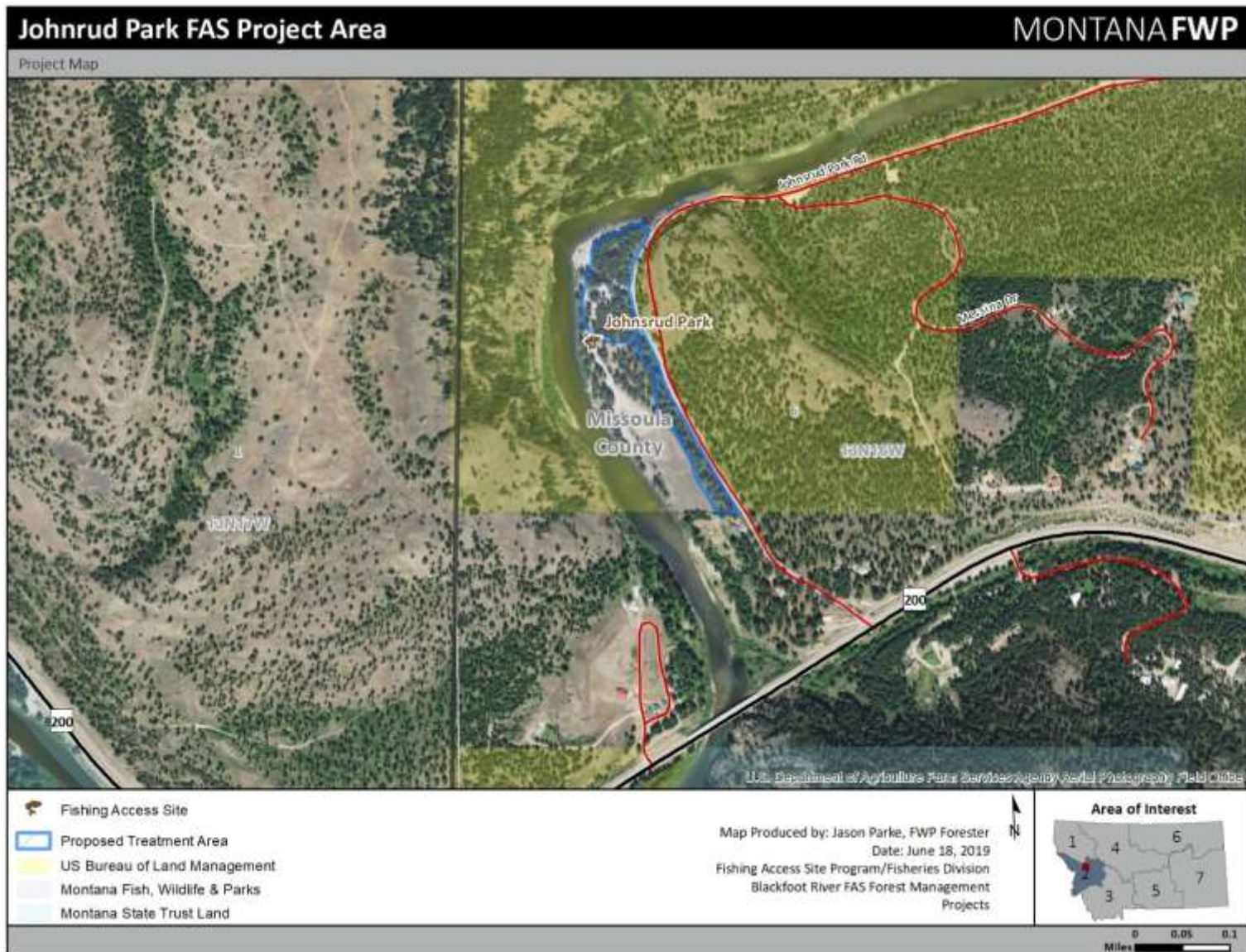


Figure 3. Johnsrud Park FAS project area map. (FWP land has pale pink overlay; US BLM land has yellow overlay; Montana State Trust Land has pale blue overlay.)

Corrick's River Bend FAS Project Area

MONTANA FWP

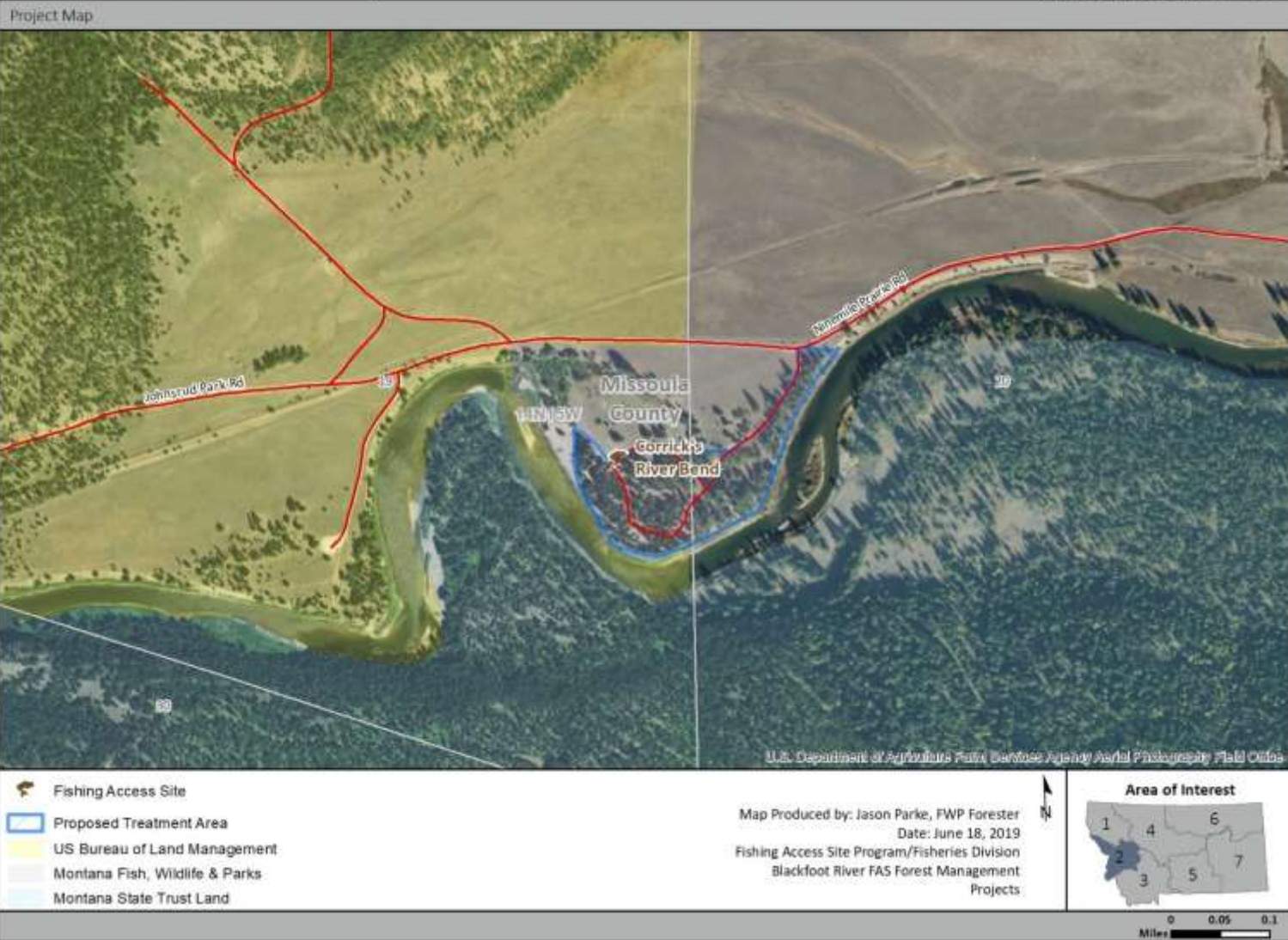


Figure 4. Corrick's River Bend FAS project area map. (FAS has pale pink overlay; US BLM land has yellow overlay; Montana State Trust Land has pale blue overlay.)

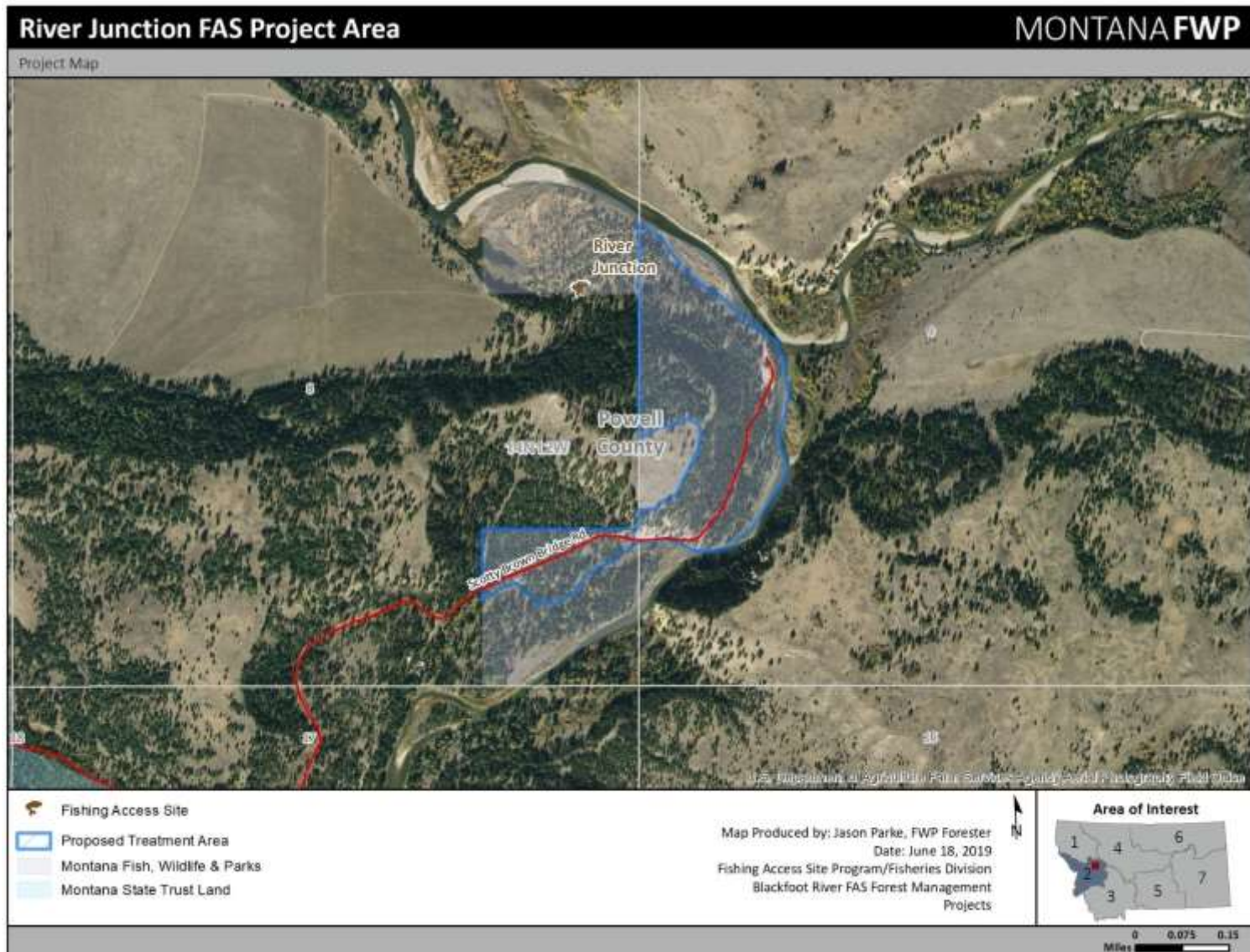


Figure 5. River Junction FAS project area map. (FAS has pale pink overlay; Montana State Trust Land has pale blue overlay.)

MEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct forest management treatments on approximately 96 acres of forest on 4 Fishing Access Sites along the Blackfoot River in FWP Region 2 (Figure 1). The treatments would involve the removal of conifer trees (both of merchantable and nonmerchantable value) through a combination of mechanized and nonmechanized methods. (Section 8, Narrative Summary below, includes a detailed description of the proposed action.)

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

FWP is authorized by law to own and manage lands as fishing access sites (FAS). The land subject to this proposal is included in the K. Ross Toole, Johnsrud Park, Corrick's River Bend, and River Junction FASs. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission endorsed this proposal in June 2019, allowing FWP to proceed with further development and analysis of this proposed action through completion of this Environmental Assessment (EA).

§ 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv) and § 87-1-621, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)

Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required to implement programs that address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife habitat enhancement giving priority to forested lands in excess of 50 contiguous acres in any state park, fishing access site, or wildlife management area under the department's jurisdiction. The Montana Legislature has provided FWP the means to accrue revenue from forest management activities and spend that revenue to fund further management projects on its forested lands.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Forest Management Plan (2018)

The FWP Forest Management Plan directs FWP to manage for desired habitat conditions and public use opportunities while maintaining the ecological integrity of forests. The plan provides a framework for developing desired future conditions (DFCs), identifies mechanical and non-mechanical treatments as management tools to achieve DFCs, and establishes guidelines for implementing forestry treatments on FWP forested lands.

§ 23-1-126, MCA, The Good Neighbor Policy of Public Land Use

As applied to public recreational land, the Good Neighbor Policy seeks to limit impacts to adjoining private and public recreational land from noxious weeds, trespass, litter, noise and light pollution, streambank erosion, and loss of privacy.

3. Name of project: Blackfoot River Fishing Access Sites Forest Management Projects

4. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Commencement Date: 11/01/2019

Estimated Completion Date: By 12/31/2025. The project is expected to take several years to complete due to the multiple project areas and phases of implementation. The operating periods for most work would be completed during the late fall (November) through early spring (April) in order to minimize disturbance to users and conduct potentially ground-disturbing activities under frozen and/or snow-covered ground conditions.

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 5%

5. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):

K. Ross Toole FAS (Figure 2); Missoula County
Township 13 North, Range 17 West, Section 10

Johnsrud Park FAS (Figure 3); Missoula County
Township 13 North, Range 16 West, Section 6

Corrick's River Bend FAS (Figure 4); Missoula County
Township 14 North, Range 15 West, Sections 19 & 20

River Junction FAS (Figure 5); Powell County
Township 14 North, Range 12 West, Section 8 & 9

6. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>96</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

7. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

Montana Department of Natural Resources
& Conservation (DNRC)

SMZ Alternative Practice

Hazard trees within the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) would need to be addressed for public safety which would require an alternative practice under the SMZ law allowing ground-based equipment to operate in the SMZ. This would be applicable to Johnsrud Parks and Corrick's River Bend FASs; an estimated 10-15 hazard trees within the SMZ would be removed at each of these sites.

(b) Funding:

Agency Name: Montana FWP

Funding Amount: Costs to FWP for these forest management treatments would be funded by a combination of the legislatively established FWP Forest Management Account, grant funding, and FAS operations and maintenance funds. Any revenue in excess of project costs would be deposited into the account to implement further forest management projects pursuant to the provisions of 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv).

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Montana State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural and Historic Resources
Missoula County Weed District	Noxious weed control
Powell County Weed District	Noxious weed control
Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation	Fire Protection

8. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

FWP is proposing to conduct forest management treatments on approximately 96 acres of 4 separate FASs with the purpose of:

- Removing hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety, property, and improvements
- Reducing the potential for hazard trees to develop by maintaining or enhancing individual tree and stand-level resilience and resistance to stressors and damaging agents (such as drought, insects and disease, wildfire)
- Reducing hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface
- Improving and maintaining aesthetics (e.g. shade, noise and visual buffering, etc.) by promoting:
 - desirable trees with healthy and full crowns
 - large trees (relatively large bole diameter and height)
 - ponderosa pine over Douglas-fir
 - removal of undesirable and suppressed trees that are competing with desirable trees
- Selling any resulting merchantable tree byproducts to offset treatment costs and generate revenue for the FWP Forest Management Account

Forest management treatments are expected to benefit:

- Safety of the public in the short-term (through removal of immediate hazard trees) and in the long-term (by promoting healthy and vigorous trees and stand conditions that would be more resilient to stressors and damaging agents)
- Improvements (such as fences, signs, structures, toilet facilities, etc.) within developed areas
- Neighboring lands and structures that may be affected by hazardous fuels in the event of a wildfire
- Aesthetics of the FASs
- A variety of wildlife species that depend on more open stand conditions (such as for foraging on understory grasses, forbs, and shrubs)
- FWP operations and maintenance funding through reduced costs of mitigating hazard trees by addressing the underlying forest health issues that lead to the development of hazard trees (i.e. tree mortality) and potentially through revenue generated by forest products sales to treat additional FASs in the future.

Forest management treatments would include approximately 96 acres of tree removal (both of trees with merchantable and nonmerchantable value). Tree planting may also be implemented in small openings created by tree removal. In silvicultural terms, these types of forest treatments would be categorized as sanitation and improvement cutting. Trees selected for removal would be based on several factors including:

- Removing hazardous trees that pose a threat to public safety, property, or improvements
- Removing trees affected by insects or diseases that have the potential to become hazards in the near future
 - Dead trees (called “snags”) would be retained for wildlife, such as cavity nesting birds, where they do not pose a threat public safety, property, or improvement.
- Removing suppressed and intermediate trees that are competing with desirable dominant and codominant trees for resources (sunlight, nutrients, and water) which, in turn increases the potential for insect- and disease-induced mortality
- Removing trees that contribute to the potential for crown fires (such as ladder fuels which are tree canopies that form vertical layers that can allow surface fires to ascend into overstory tree crowns in the event of a wildfire)
- Removing additional trees to reduce competition stress and create a more vigorous and resilient stand condition overall.

Tree removal would be accomplished through a combination of mechanized methods. Merchantable trees would be treated with ground-based logging equipment, such as feller-bunchers and skidders, that would cut and skid trees to designated roadside locations (called “landings”). Tree stems would be delimbed and processed into logs. Logs would be loaded onto log trucks and hauled to local forest product manufacturing facilities. Nonmerchantable trees (trees too small to be manufactured into forest products) would be treated by mastication or felled with chainsaws. Slash (the nonmerchantable limbs and tree tops) and cull material generated from this process would be treated either by piling and burning, grinding or chipping, and/or removing the material from the site.

Ground disturbance is expected on skid trails and at landing areas. Any ground disturbance (exposed, displaced, or compacted soils) would be rehabbed and seeded with a native grass seed mix. Contractors hired to do this work would be required to adhere to Montana Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs). FWP would develop a site-specific treatment plan for each site with contractors hired to do this work. This plan would identify resource protection measures to minimize impacts to the site. FWP would oversee the activities while they are on-going to ensure compliance with the plan and to minimize resource impacts.

Access to the project areas would be from existing roads. Roads would be upgraded to the extent necessary to facilitate logging and log hauling while meeting BMPs. Temporary “jump-up” roads (relatively short spur roads) may be needed in some areas. These would be located on flat ground and where excavation could be avoided. Ground impacts, such as more severe soil compaction or soil exposure, may be greater on these spur roads. These would be reclaimed and blocked to prevent unauthorized motorized use. Road work would be short duration (1 to 2 days) and would be done during periods when the soil moisture is adequate to allow for adequate shaping and compaction.

The operating period for the proposed treatments would be from November 1 through April 15 in order to minimize impacts to users. Ground based logging equipment would be restricted to December 1 through March 15 and required to operate under relatively dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions in order to minimize impacts to soil and vegetation. Other clean-up and rehab activities, such as slash treatment, grass seeding, and tree planting would be short duration (1 to 2 days) and could potentially occur throughout the operating period. If slash is piled and burned, burn piles would be located in openings away from residual trees and neighboring property lines. Burning would be conducted in accordance with open burning seasons and applicable state and county regulations.

Road work and logging activities would comply with Montana Forestry BMPs and the Montana Streamside Management Zone law. To minimize the spread of noxious weeds; all equipment would be cleaned and

inspected by FWP before moving onto the FWP lands. Exposed bare mineral soils would be reseeded immediately and any weed infestations would be treated with herbicides indefinitely through annual FAS weed management efforts.

K. Ross Toole FAS Proposed Treatment

Access to the K. Ross Toole FAS is off a short existing road connecting directly to Highway 200. The area proposed for treatment is approximately 11 acres. The forest stand is dominated by mature ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch (Figures 6 & 7). There is a dense understory of Douglas-fir sapling and pole-sized trees (Figures 6 & 7). Rocky mountain juniper and black cottonwood are also present on the site. There are small pockets of dead ponderosa pine from mountain pine beetle infestation (>5 years old). The dense understory of Douglas-fir poses a crown fire risk and the property is bordered by private lands with residences on the west and north sides. The proposal for this site would be remove hazard trees near the parking area, thin the understory Douglas-fir to reduce ladder fuels, and thin suppressed and intermediate trees to improve stand vigor. FWP would mark trees to cut with tree paint based on the removal criteria described previously in the summary of proposed action.



Figure 6. View of the K. Ross Toole FAS proposed treatment area, looking south from the parking area.



Figure 7. Dense Douglas-fir understory within the proposed treatment area of the K. Ross Toole FAS.

Johnsrud Park FAS Proposed Treatment

Access to the Johnsrud Park FAS is off Johnsrud Park Road and existing roads within the site. The area proposed for treatment is approximately 6 acres. Approximately 4 acres of the proposed treatment area (the north end of the site near the entrance and boat ramp) are dominated by mature Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine (Figure 8). Approximately 2 acres, which is a narrow strip of forest along a slope adjacent to the Johnsrud Park Road, is a two-storied stand with an overstory of predominantly mature ponderosa pine and an understory of sapling and pole-sized ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and Rocky Mountain juniper (Figure 9). Some overstory ponderosa pine are infected with Comandra blister rust which has led to top-kill. Some Douglas-fir have died from a combination of competition stress, root compaction (along roads and parking areas), and possibly chemical damage from dust abatement. The stand is at moderate risk for Douglas-fir beetle infestation due to the high density of mature Douglas-fir. On the northern-most 4 acres, the proposed treatment would be to remove hazard and potential hazard trees and thin suppressed and intermediate trees to improve stand vigor. On the other 2 acres, the proposed treatment would be to thin the dense understory trees while retaining all overstory and some of the understory trees to maintain a dust, noise, and visual buffer from the Johnsrud Park Road. FWP would mark trees to cut with tree paint based on the removal criteria described previously in the summary of proposed action.



Figure 8. Dense, mature stand of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine in the northern portion of the proposed treatment area of the Johnsrud Park FAS.



Figure 9. Dense understory of the two-storied stand in the southern portion of the proposed treatment unit on the Johnsrud Park FAS.

Corrick's River Bend FAS Proposed Treatment

Access to the Corrick's River Bend FAS is off Ninemile Prairie Road and existing roads within the site. The area proposed for treatment is approximately 13 acres. The forest stand is dominated by mature ponderosa pine with scattered sapling-sized ponderosa pine in the understory (Figure 10). Some overstory ponderosa pine are infected with Comandra blister rust which has led to top-kill. Verbanone packets have been used on the site in the past to protect trees from mountain pine beetle infestation (Figure 11). The proposed treatment would be to thin suppressed and intermediate trees to promote mountain pine beetle resistance and lightly thin some of the dense understory ponderosa pine, retaining enough to maintain visual screening between campsites. FWP would mark trees to cut with tree paint based on the removal criteria described previously in the summary of proposed action.



Figure 10. Mature ponderosa pines dominate the Corrick's River Bend FAS.



Figure 11. The white packets on the ponderosa pine in Corrick's River Bend FAS are verbanone packets, which contain a chemical that deters bark beetles from attacking the trees. The treatment lasts only for one season and needs to be re-applied each year. Across the landscape, bark beetle populations have markedly decreased from the record levels of 2009-2015. Locally or regionally, populations may increase resulting from tree-damaging events such as wildfires or windthrow.

River Junction FAS Proposed Treatments

Access to the River Junction FAS is off Scotty Brown Bridge Road and existing roads within the site. The area proposed for treatment is approximately 66 acres. The forest stand is dominated by mature Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, with some western larch on northerly aspects. The understory is primarily composed of clumpy, suppressed patches of Douglas-fir saplings (Figure 12). The area provides elk and deer winter range and many of the Douglas-fir saplings are heavily browsed. Approximately 13 acres are composed of younger, pole sized ponderosa pine that have experience patch mountain pine beetle mortality (Figure 13). Some overstory ponderosa pine are infected with Comandra blister rust which has led to top-kill. The stand is at moderate risk for Douglas-fir beetle infestation due to the high density of mature Douglas-fir. The proposed treatment would involve four different types of treatment:

1. Around the campground, boat ramp, and parking area, only hazard trees or trees at risk of becoming hazards in the short-term would be removed.
2. On the gentler slopes (<40%) outside the developed area, suppressed and intermediate trees would be thinned out to improve tree vigor, reduce the potential for crown fire, and to promote resistance to bark beetle infestation.

3. On steeper slopes (>40%) where ground-based logging equipment cannot operate, understory trees would be hand-thinned to reduce ladder fuels.
4. In the younger, pole sized ponderosa pine most of the dead trees would be removed (retaining some to provide habitat diversity) and live trees would be thinned to average spacing of approximately 15 to 20 feet to reduce the potential for crown fire, promote vigor, and increase resilience to bark beetles.

FWP would mark trees to cut with tree paint based on the removal criteria described previously in the summary of proposed action.



Figure 12. Typical forest condition outside the developed area of the River Junction FAS.



Figure 13. Approximately 13 acres of the River Junction FAS are dominated by pole-sized ponderosa pine that has been affected by mountain pine beetle and has patches of dead and downed trees.

9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative A: No Action

Fish, Wildlife & Parks would not conduct the proposed forest management activities under this alternative. Forest succession and competition amongst trees for limited resources (nutrients, sunlight, and water) would continue, leading to decreased stand vigor and potential for trees and stands to be less resilient to stressors and damaging agents. Maintenance costs may increase over time as more trees die and increasingly pose threats to public safety, property, and improvement. Dead and downed fuels may increase and as new trees regenerate in gaps created from overstory mortality, ladder fuels may also increase leading to increased hazardous fuel build up. Dead and downed trees may negatively affect the aesthetics of the FASs and make hiking in these areas more difficult. Higher stand densities and increased dead and downed wood may increase habitat availability for species that depend on that condition while potentially negatively affecting species that depend on more open stand conditions. No timber would be sold to potentially generate revenue for the FWP forest management account.

FWP would continue mitigating hazard trees and maintaining improvements in these FASs.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Conduct forested habitat treatments on approximately 96 acres of the 4 FASs as described in #8 (Narrative Summary), above. Following this action, FWP anticipates that a hazard trees would be mitigated, tree vigor and resilience to insects and diseases would be improved, hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface would be reduced, aesthetics would be improved, and the sale of timber may generate revenue for the FWP forest management account.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		Yes	1.b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other (list)		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1.b. Existing roads would need to be improved to facilitate removal of timber and timber byproduct. These roads would be brought up to BMP specifications and all road work would comply with current BMP standards and applicable laws to minimize impacts to riparian areas and prevent sediment delivery to (or siltation of) perennial water bodies. Summer logging activity may disturb and compact soil, potentially temporarily impacting vegetation.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X		Yes	2.a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		Yes	2.b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		X				
f. Other		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2.a,b. Slash and residual byproduct generated during the course of the proposed treatments may be burned on-site. Burning of slash would comply with Missoula and Powell County open burning timing restrictions and comply with inter-agency slash treatment regulations.

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		Yes	3.b
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?			X		Yes	3.d
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		X				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3.b,d. Treating the subject stands may slightly alter the rate and volume of spring runoff and retained snowpack. Given the limited scale of the project and condition of adjacent stands, this effect is expected to be minor.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		Yes	4.a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X		Yes	4.b
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4.e
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4.a,b,e. Part of the project intent is to improve forest vigor and reduce the susceptibility of the treated stands to insects, diseases, and crown fire. The proposed action would thin forest stands, reducing competition stress of the residual vegetation within the treatment units. The thinning would support growth of shrubs and other deciduous vegetation by opening the canopy and allowing more sunlight to get to the forest floor. Please see #8 above for a more detailed description of proposed treatments. Noxious weed spread would be mitigated by requiring equipment to be washed before entering the FAS, minimizing ground disturbance, immediately reseeding disturbed areas, and treating affected areas or areas at risk with herbicide for at least 3 years following the treatment.

5. FISH / WILDLIFE	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X		Yes	5.b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X		Yes	5.c
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		Yes	5.g
h. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		X				
i. <input type="checkbox"/> <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish and Wildlife:

5.g. Forest management activities would benefit some nongame species and negatively impact others. Overall, the relatively short duration of each individual project and the timing of the work would have minimal impacts on nongame species. Cavity nesting bird and mammal species and those that forage on dead or dying trees may be negatively impacted through the removal of snags and downed timber that are determined to be hazardous. Additionally, early spring timber harvest may displace some bird species that establish nesting territories during that time (late-February - March; northern flickers, great horned owls, etc.). However, these species are not expected to be permanently displaced from the FASs. Opening of the tree canopy is expected to promote the growth of grasses, forbs, and understory shrubs that would benefit a wide variety of bird and small mammal species especially songbirds that rely on multi-story stands of deciduous vegetation for nesting and foraging. The FWP forester and the nongame biologist would coordinate to avoid forestry work around sensitive species and during sensitive times (e.g., nesting bald eagles and great blue herons).

Forestry activities, including the removal of younger Douglas-fir, are likely to attract white-tailed deer to these sites for the period of operation, increasing their abundance. The increase of white-tailed deer abundance and the proximity of these sites to Montana Highway 200, may increase roadkill.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE & ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		No	6.a
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X		No	6.b
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Effects (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6.a,b. Logging and trucking equipment would increase noise levels on the project area while activities are ongoing, but these activities would occur outside of high-use seasons for the FASs (e.g., during the late-fall through early-spring season). Merchantable timber byproducts would be transported out of the FASs via existing road within the FASs and county roads.

7. <u>LAND USE</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Use (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8. RISK / HEALTH HAZARDS	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X			8.a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			8.c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8.a,c. Timber management activities are inherently dangerous. All contractors would be required to comply with federal and state safety standards for logging operations as established by the United States Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA; 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910 and any other such applicable regulations promulgated by OSHA) and as required by Title 50, Chapter 71 of the Montana Code Annotated, and any regulations promulgated to implement the statutes found in that Title and Chapter of the Montana Code Annotated.

Forestry activities, including the removal of younger Douglas-fir, are likely to attract white-tailed deer to these sites for the period of operation, increasing their abundance. The increase of white-tailed deer abundance and the proximity of these sites to Montana Highway 200, may result in an increase of road-killed white-tailed deer and pose a risk to motor vehicle drivers.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?			X		N/A	9.c.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?			X		N/A	9.d.
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X		Yes	9.e
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Impact (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9.c,d,e. Jobs would be created or sustained by project work while the project is ongoing. Log hauling and contractor traffic would increase during the project. Roads and other infrastructure that would be used by contractors were designed (and would be maintained) to support commercial logging and log transport activities. Signage would be placed near the entrance of the FAS and where log trucks would enter public roads to alert traffic of log truck activity. According to the Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research, the harvest of a million board-feet of timber equates to roughly 10 jobs annually.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			X		N/A	10.b
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?			X		N/A	10.d
e. Define projected revenue sources			X		N/A	10.e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.			X		N/A	10.f
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10.b,d. The Project would be expected to increase state and local tax revenues from the sale of fuel, supplies and/or equipment and from contractor employees' income. Fuel and electricity would be required to treat stands and process the timber byproduct.

10.e. Depending on the market conditions of logging and hauling costs, and delivered log prices for the timber byproduct removed, the project might generate revenue for FWP's Forest Management Account (authorized by § 87-1-621, MCA) to be used for future forest management projects.

10.f. Post-treatment maintenance costs may be incurred for slash disposal, noxious weed treatments, and tree planting. FWP would provide funding for maintenance costs from its Forest Management Account and/or Region 2 FAS Maintenance funds. The mitigation of hazard trees may reduce the maintenance burden.

11. <u>AESTHETICS / RECREATION</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X		N/A	11.a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11.a. Some treated stands would be visible from roads and developed sites within FAS and, in the short term (< 3 years), aesthetics may be negatively affected until the slash and debris has been cleaned up and disturbed ground has been rehabbed. In the long term (> 5 years), aesthetics would be improved. FWP anticipates that the crown fire risk and potential for bark beetle infestation, which would also modify the scenic vista, would be reduced.

12. <u>CULTURAL / HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u>	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)						12.d
e. Other:						12.e

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

12.d,e. FWP would consult with the State Historic Preservation office (SHPO) on this proposed project and avoid altering heritage properties or paleontological remains. If cultural artifacts were to be discovered during the project, FWP would cease activities and contact SHPO, and potentially adjust the project design to avoid impacting these resources.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)			X		Yes	13.a
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13.a. This project would mitigate hazardous trees, improve tree vigor and reduce susceptibility of stand to insects and diseases, reduce crown fire potential within the proposed treatment units, improve aesthetics, and potentially generate revenue for the FWP forest management account. Work proposed in this EA may compliment similar forestry work on adjacent lands, but FWP does not anticipate any cumulative negative impacts to result if this project were completed.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to implement forest management activities on approximately 96 acres of forest on four separate FASs in FWP Region 2. If approved by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission, the work would begin as early as November 2019. The purpose is to address hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety, property, and improvements; improve resilience and resistance to stressors and damaging agents; reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland-urban interface; improve aesthetics; and potentially generate income for the FWP forest management account.

FWP would select which trees for removal based on the criteria described in #8 (Narrative Summary) above. Site-specific operating plans would be developed for each site to be treated and FWP would oversee operations while they are on-going. Slash disposal and rehabilitation would be required as part of the contract and FWP would implement integrated noxious weed management to prevent noxious weed establishment and spread. Operations would be conducted in the late-fall through early-spring to minimize impact to users. Ground disturbing activities would be limited to periods of relatively dry, frozen, or snow-covered conditions. Contractors would be required to adhere to Montana Forestry BMPs. The cost of the project is expected to be partially offset by the sale of timber byproducts and, depending on market conditions and logging costs, the projects may generate income for the FWP forest management account.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The public would be notified as follows, to comment on the proposed Blackfoot River FAS Forest Management Project, including its draft EA and alternatives:

- A news release would be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 2 issues. This news release would also be posted on FWP Region 2's website <http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r2/>.
- One legal notice would be published in each of these newspapers: *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (Seeley Lake), and *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge).
- Copies would be available at the FWP Region 2 Headquarters in Missoula and the FWP state headquarters in Helena.
- Copies of this environmental assessment would be mailed (or notification of its availability emailed) to neighboring landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to assure their knowledge of the Proposed Action.
- Public notice on FWP's webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Recent Public Notices"). The Draft EA would also be available on this website, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.

Copies of this EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula MT, 5980; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's website <http://fwp.mt.gov> under Public Notices.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few physical and human impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Public Comment Period

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days beginning August 8, 2019. Comments must be received by FWP no later than September 6, 2019 and can be mailed to the address below:

Region 2 FWP
Attn: Blackfoot FASs EA
3201 Spurgin Rd
Missoula, MT 59804

or emailed to Sharon Rose at shrose@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

No. Based upon the above assessment which has identified a limited number of minor impacts to the physical and human environment that would be either for a short duration or can be mitigated below the level of significance, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

- 2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Rory Zarling
Fishing Access Site Program Manager, FWP Region 2
3201 Spurgin Rd, Missoula, MT 59804; (406) 363-7161

Scott Eggeman
Blackfoot Area Wildlife Biologist, FWP Region 2
PO Box 15, Seeley Lake, MT 59868; (406) 542-5542

Torrey Ritter
Nongame Biologist, FWP Region 2
3201 Spurgin Rd, Missoula, MT 59804; (406) 542-5551

R. Jason Parke
Forester, FWP Headquarters
P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620; (406) 444-7329

- 3. List of entities consulted during preparation of the EA:** None.